

Guidelines for journalists



Church Action on Poverty often gets asked to help find people with first-hand experience willing to talk directly to the media. We want to make sure that they get treated with respect – this is top of their list of what they want from journalists.

Talking to the media is a scary and intimidating prospect for many – let alone having one's face appear on TV or in the newspaper. This can be embarrassing and means the 'case study' is left with judgements and negative comments from friends, family and neighbours – long after the journalist has moved on to the next story.

Many people also find that the experience of being in the media builds their confidence and self-esteem. These guidelines have been produced by 'case studies' to help journalists like you to be fair. Please read them and discuss them beforehand with people you are interviewing.

Guidelines

- Agree the questions beforehand.
- Stick to the topic and the agreed questions.
- Try to listen without too much judgement. Journalists usually portray people experiencing poverty as villain or victim. Try not to perpetuate these stereotypes.
- Consider not showing their face by using a silhouette, over-the-shoulder shot or pixellation.

Common-sense courtesy

- Provide an opportunity to check the final version before broadcast or print.
- Leave them your contact details so they can get back to you.
- Let the interviewee know when the article or piece is being printed or broadcast.
- Make sure you are on time.
- Give some credit or mention of the organisation that arranged the interview.
- Check you have the correct names and details.

Compensation

- Offer to cover the expenses of the participant.
- Provide a copy of the final article or clip.

Acknowledgements: These guidelines are based on a workshop in Thornaby-on-Tees in September 2009. Please direct any comments to Alan on 0161 236 9321 or alant@church-poverty.org.uk

Talking to the media?

What you should know



The media often want a 'case study' to bring a story to life. This is a great opportunity to 'tell it how it is', and to widen awareness and understanding of your issues. You can make people in power listen. Afterwards, most people feel very pleased that they have been in the media. They say how their confidence and self-esteem have grown, and feel good for standing up for their cause.

But it can go badly. Journalists can misrepresent you or take your comments out of context, and it can be embarrassing when people you know make negative comments. This simple checklist has been developed by people like you – ordinary people who have been asked to be on the TV, radio or in a newspaper. This is their advice for you.

A checklist of what to remember

Beforehand

- Ask them what they're after and get a list of questions. If you are not happy with any of the questions, let them know - and your reasons.
- Prepare two or three key points you want to concentrate on.
- Tell them if you want to be anonymous or have your face concealed – *but* this might mean it doesn't happen.
- If you want someone to sit in the interview with you, make this clear.
- Ask them to agree to the guidelines on the other side of this piece of paper.
- Understand the implications. Some people will applaud you – but not everyone.
- Ask how long it will all take.

During the interview

- Keep focused on the subject – stick to your two or three points at all costs.
- Mention your group or organisation.
- Be confident, assertive and comfortable – speak clearly.
- If you are uncomfortable with the way the interview is going, make this clear to the person interviewing you.

Afterwards

- Ask to see a copy before print or broadcast, to check it for accuracy.

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